NEWS ANALYSIS 1-0615 APRIL 21, 1976
RONALD J. DUNLAVEY

SYRIA, ISRAEL AND THE LEBANESE CRISIS

ANNCR: VOA NEWS ANALYST RONALD J. DUNLAVEY DISCUSSES THE ROLE OF SYRIA AND ISRAEL IN THE CURRENT LEBANESE CRISIS:

VOICE:

WHEN THE LATEST LEBANESE CRISIS BEGAN, THE GREATEST CONCERN BY MOST INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS WAS THAT IT MIGHT LEAD TO A NEW MIDEAST WAR, BEGINNING WITH A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN SYRIA AND ISRAEL. SYRIA, IT WAS THOUGHT, MIGHT INTERVENE, THUS TRIGGERING AN ISRAELI COUNTER-INTERVENTION. FOR THE ISRAELIS HAD FREQUENTLY WARNED THAT THEY WOULD NOT TOLERATE FOREIGN INTERVENTION, WHICH THEY CONSIDERED A POTENTIAL THREAT TO THEIR SECURITY.

INSTEAD, THE CRISIS HAS LED TO A WELCOME DISPLAY OF RESTRAINT ON THE PART OF SYRIA AND ISRAEL. THE SYRIANS DID INTERVENE--- BUT ON A VERY LIMITED SCALE AND FOR CAREFULLY-DEFINED MOTIVES WHICH APPEARED TO HAVE BEEN UNDERSTOOD BY THE ISRAELIS. THE ISRAELIS, IN TURN, MODIFIED THEIR EARLIER POSITION THAT NO INTERVENTION WOULD BE TOLERATED, AND DID NOT RESPOND WITH MILITARY COUNTER-MOVES WHEN THE SYRIAN FORCES CROSSED THE BORDER.

THIS RESTRAINT WAS CLEARLY DICTATED BY MUTUAL SELF-INTEREST. BOTH SYRIA AND ISRAEL WERE INTERESTED IN PROMOTING A SETTLEMENT THAT WOULD LEAD TO A STABLE GOVERNMENT IN LEBANON. AND THE ONLY WAY TO STOP THE CIVIL WAR AND GIVE THE SETTLEMENT A CHANCE SEEMED TO BE THROUGH THE EXERTION OF A DEGREE OF PRESSURE BY SYRIA ON THE LEBANESE FACTIONS THIS WAS WIDELY RECOGNIZED, AND EVEN THE UNITED STATES, WHILE REITERATING AMERICAN OPPOSITION TO MILITARY INTERVENTION THAT MIGHT LEAD TO WAR, EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT SYRIA WAS PLAYING A CONSTRUCTIVE POLITICAL ROLE.

THE LEBANESE CRISIS IS FAR FROM OVER. AS SECRETARY KISSINGER REMARKED LAST WEEK, THE PROSPECTS HAVE IMPROVED SOMEWHAT, BUT IT IS LIKE WALKING THROUGH A MINEFIELD WHERE A MAJOR EXPLOSION COULD COME AT ANY MOMENT. NEVERTHELESS, THE DISPLAY OF RESTRAINT BY SYRIA AND ISRAEL---TWO OF THE MAJOR ANTAGONISTS IN THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT---IS ONE OF THE BRIGHTER ASPECTS OF THE SITUATION. A SIMILAR DISPLAY OF RESTRAINT---A SIMILAR AWARENESS OF THE REALITIES INHERENT IN THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY OPTIONS---ON THE PART OF THE LEBANESE FACTIONS THEMSELVES COULD ENHANCE STILL FURTHER THE PROSPECTS FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT.

-0-